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ABSTRACT

Drawing on census and survey data from 1940 to 1990, this book offers an overview of the dramatic transformations in American childhood over the past 50 years and presents the case for overhauling national child welfare policies. The first chapter examines the life course of children and provides an introduction to the remainder of the book. Chapter 2 notes the revolutionary decline in the number of siblings in families, the corresponding revolution in potential sibling companionship, and the competition for family resources. Chapter 3 shows the increase in the ratio of children experiencing the potential disadvantage of having only one parent. Chapter 4 discusses the displacement of the farm family by the breadwinner-homemaker and dual-earner families. Chapter 5 analyzes the two revolutions in child care arrangements, first for children over 6 and then for younger children, that have taken place as more young children are cared for outside the home. Data are provided on the increasing number of preschoolers without full time parental care. Chapter 6 shows how the first child-care revolution led to a revolution in parent education, as the children of one era became the parents of the next. Chapter 7 focuses on income trends through the 1900s. Chapter 8 shows that most relatively poor children since 1939 have lived in fully self-supporting, working-poor families and notes the impact of welfare usage. Chapter 9 analyzes the impact of changes in fathers' income and mothers' income. Chapter 10 provides an analysis of the ways in which these and other trends are related to one another by exploring some fundamental causes of changes in fathers' income, the rise of mothers' labor-force participation, and the rise of mother-only families. A concluding chapter provides a detailed summary of the changes in resources available to children and on their life course circumstances, with special emphasis on differences by race and ethnic origin. Contains 195 references. (WP)